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"MANY SHALL RUN TO AND FRO, AND KNOWLEDGE SHALL BE INCREASED."—DANIEL xii. 4.

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GENERAL LITERATURE.

THE ROBBER SON.

IN the North of England, not many years ago, there lived a hard-working farmer, whose heart was divided between the world and an only son. Rising early, and pushing with untiring industry the labors of the field, he was steadily amassing a handsome property. But he labored not for himself. He was ever willing to forego the ordinary comforts of life, for the sake of laying up the money which he thus saved, adding yearly to the sum which he would leave behind him when he came to die.

So stern was this farmer in his intercourse with his fellow men, so harsh in his treatment of the labourers whom he employed, so repulsive to the poor who sought alms at his gate, that it was hard to believe there was any tenderness in his heart where affection could take root. But his great weakness was fondness for his boy. He doted on his son; thought nothing too good to lavish on him; indulged him in all the waywardness of a childish temper, and suffered no one to control his will. But when the severe labors of the day were over, he seemed to become a father, and with his son on his knee, or sporting around him, he gave way to the strong impulses of his un-subdued heart. The future looked bright to Mr. Wilson, only as it brought before him the pleasure he should find in the society and improvement of his son. John was his father's pride, and Mr. Wilson never cherished a thought that this boy could be otherwise than kind and dutiful, fulfilling all his hopes, and yielding a rich harvest of comfort to his father in his old age.

John was a promising lad, active, intelligent, amiable. Had he been set to work at the proper time, and required always to obey; had his will been early restrained by proper counsel, and suitable truths inculcated, perhaps he would have shamed his father only by showing how much better was the son than the sire. But his father loved him too much to make him work; and loved him so much that he never saw his faults. While Mr. Wilson was hard at work in the field, John was left to amuse himself as he pleased; and as it was lonesome to play ALONE, he found company with idle boys in the neighbourhood, who readily helped him to spend his time. When he became old enough, the boys led him off, fishing and bird-nesting, and in these excursions they, not very seldom, were tempted to trespass on private grounds, at the risk of arrest and punishment. This was a sad school for an ungoverned boy, but he learned his lessons rapidly, and they made deep impressions on his heart. He loved to stroll over the country in pursuit of amusement, and when no incidents occurred to enliven the day, his companions were not slow in devising mischief, in which John heartily joined. This mischief was not always of the most harmless kind, and when once entered upon, a train of deceit was laid to conceal the authors.

But I will not trace the progress of this youth in the road of ruin; nor stop to notice

the gradual influence of evil associations upon his susceptible mind. It was with him as with other boys who are suffered to go ungoverned, to spend their days as they please, being supplied with money freely, and encouraged, rather than checked, in the pursuit of pleasure. That he became a profane swearer was almost a matter of course. That he was reckless, dissipated, and impatient even of the slight restraint that his father's house imposed, was natural. He knew that his father loved him, and that sometimes served to hold him back in his prodigal career. He often wished that he was away from home, and when he hinted to his father that it would be better to let him go to the city, and engage in some kind of business, for the first time in his life, his father denied his request, and told him he could never consent to have him go from home. Not that Mr. Wilson had any fears of the consequences. He knew that John was inclined to some bad habits, but he said he was only "sowing his wild oats," and would be sober when he became a man.

When John found he could not leave home, he resolved that he would. One of his boon companions railed at him for being governed by his "old father," and he soon made up his mind to seek his fortune on the world. He left his father's house in the night, and never entered it again.

Mr. Wilson was inconsolable when he found that he was childless; and childless not by the stroke of death; that might have been borne. But when the son on whom he had doted from infancy, around whom all the affections of a strong heart clustered, the only being in the universe whom he loved, and the only hope that smiled on the gloom of his dark soul—when that son deserted him and became a vagabond, Mr. Wilson found how

—“worse than serpent's tooth it is,
To have a thankless child.”

He sought him, but he found him not. He sent advertisements to the city papers, and offered strong inducements to “a wandering child,” to persuade him to come back; or if he would not, “his father would only ask to know where he could be seen, and his wants should be abundantly supplied.” But no answer came. Perhaps his son never saw his appeals. Or perhaps he did, and laughed at them.

In those long, anxious nights which followed the departure of this prodigal son, Mr. Wilson was compelled to review his mode of training up his child, and his own good sense convinced him that he had suffered his affection for John to blind him to his faults, and that those faults were the appropriate fruits of parental indulgence. He had never governed his son, and how could his son be expected to govern himself? He had never required his son to obey when he was a child, and why should he obey now that he had grown to be a young man. These reflections were like daggers in his heart; and bitter were the tears with which his pillow was wet, when he felt that his darling boy was probably ruin-

ed, and that ruin caused by his father's excessive love.

Months passed, and years wore away, but John returned not. No tidings reached his father's ears; hope failed, and John was seldom or never mentioned. Mr. Wilson was a stern man, and no one wished his displeasure; and as all allusion to the lost one evidently roused strong emotions, John was never referred to in his hearing.

Several years after his son's departure, Mr. Wilson was returning one evening from a distant market town, and having been detained later than usual, the night set in before he reached home. He had occasion to pass through a piece of woods; the darkness and silence of the place and the hour, were congenial to the sadness that had now so long been on his heart, and it was natural that he should become wrapt in thought of his loved and long lost son. The memory of his infancy and childhood came up, and his sweet boy laughed by his side as he trudged after the plough, or nestled in his arms when the day's work was done. But now he was returning to his solitary home, and none that loved him would greet him; and what would he give could he once more meet his wayward but still cherished John. Thoughts like these were crowding on him; and the old man wept like a child as he rode through the woods. A robber rushed from the thicket, and seizing his horse—demanded his money.

The stout farmer, under other circumstances, might have offered resistance, but now he had no heart left, and as he delivered his purse, could not refrain from disclosing the thought that rushed upon him:—“I hope my boy is not a robber.”

The villain, who had already the purse in his hand, tossed it back with intense emotion, as he cried:

“FATHER! if you had governed me when a boy, I should not have robbed you when I am a man!!!”—and with these words he plunged into the thicket, and was out of sight in an instant.

Mr. Wilson's cup of anguish was full. He had met his son; he had heard his voice; had been called “father,” by his own boy; but alas for him, his boy was a highwayman, an outlaw, and, as his last crime, had plundered his own father! And more than this, his son had planted another dagger in his heart that never would be drawn. His lost son had indeed come back, but only to tell the care-worn father, that early indulgence, prompted by parental love, had made his son a robber! Oh! could he forget those words; they rang in his ears as he pursued his journey; they startled him as he tried to sleep after he came home; they followed him into the field by day, and haunted his pillow by night; the weeks were long, and the months dragged on, and with sorrow the gray hairs of the old man were soon brought down to the grave. He never heard from his son again. Parental indulgence ruined the son, and filial ingratitude murdered the father.